BACK TO MONUMENTALITY
Modernisation and Memorialisation in Post-War Yugoslavia

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Abstract

Only a few Yugoslav architects attended Post-War CIAMs, whose reception in Yugoslavia was rather lukewarm. This may perhaps suffice to question the role of Yugoslavia in the European and international architectural debate. However, to understand the importance acquired by memorials and monumental architecture in Yugoslavia, contrary to the Modernist orthodoxy, a series of historical events should come into focus. In Yugoslavia, architects internalized monuments as a specific design field, and monumentality as a quality to achieve.
Along this line of thoughts, this paper ends by exploring the 1957 architectural design competition for the Jajinci Memorial in Belgrade, arguing that the architectural representation of state socialism, all but univocal, was actually defying stereotypes, and that the generation emerging in the decade 1950-1960 marked a true political, social and cultural watershed.

Keywords: Monumentality, Post-War Memorials, Yugoslavia.

Modern monumentality, modern monument

> *'[...] monuments and memorials are located in a country where, for centuries, the living coveted the dead.'*

These seemingly harsh words by Serbian painter P. Misovaljević (1980: 257) may well introduce the importance of memorial architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1990), a country established after World War II, which confederated different ethno-religious groups. Each with its own culture and traditions, these

groups had shaped for centuries the troubled history of the Balkans between East and West.

The narrative about the newly established political and cultural unity was deeply rooted into the feats of the Partisan movement, always surrounded by an aura of legend in the cultural public sphere. The Liberation War – and the Socialist Revolution that followed – enhanced the epic narrative of World War II, whereas public celebrations of battles and offensives, war heroes, personal and collective tragedies, were often presented as the victory of good over evil.

This eagerness to memorialise pushed for artistic representation, mobilising architecture and the visual arts to reach the broadest possible consensus. The symbolic imagery consolidated in some key examples, which clearly epitomise the singularity of Yugoslavia as a case study.

The discourse on Monumentality provides us with a reading lens for approaching the local architectural debate.

Recent literature and historiographical accounts on Yugoslavia, often dub the architecture produced in the Socialist period as 'in between', 'hybrid' or 'unique,' somehow highlighting its growing international relevance. From 15 July 2018 to 13 January 2019, the New York Museum of Modern Art hosted the exhibition 'Towards a Concrete Utopia,' presenting public buildings and monuments dating back to the socialist time. On visiting this exhibition, we may agree with Kulić that Yugoslavian architecture was not a cohesive body of buildings and projects, much rather it was the result of different 'centres' (Kulić, 2012), schools and 'patriarchs' (Kulić, 2009, p. 294).

Such differences faded throughout the post-war reconstruction, when monuments were back on the scene as an architectural theme, in sharp contrast with the Modern Movement dismissal of monument design. Lewis Mumford believed that monument was as a society's fixation on death over life. In his essay *The death of the Monument,* Mumford argued that the very notion of 'modern monument' was a contradiction in terms: a monument could not be modern, and a modern building could not be a monument.' (Mumford, 1937, p.264) Nonetheless, he

admitted that functional buildings favouring human betterment - far from commemorating death - could express some kind of monumentality.

Just before the end of World War II, some European architects who had moved to the United States showed a renewed interest into the spatial qualities of monuments. After the war, while the discourse on monumentality animated the Yugoslavian debate, monumentality re-appeared in the theoretical statements made by many CIAM members. Both architects and town planners unconditionally disapproved the '*false monumentaily'* of the interwar period (Giedion, 1958), when totalitarian regimes mistook celebration for commemoration, and produced buildings on a gigantic scale overloaded with rhetoric which '*dwarfed a man.*' (D. Elliot, 1963, p.37)

Giedions' revaluation of monumental expression in architecture called on the human universal need for '*buildings that represent their social, ceremonial and community life*' (Giedion, 1958, p.27). Much of Giedion's written work was based on conferences, essays and lectures which he delivered from 1944 to 1956. In 1956, *Architecture you and Me* was published in German[1] and translated into English in 1958. Questioning themes like taste, sculpture, politics and art in relation to social changes, Giedion's ideas paved the way for CIAM post-war agenda (after the single cell and urbanism).

He wrote: *The third step lies ahead. In view of what has happened in the last century and because of the way modern architecture has come into being, it is the most dangerous and the most difficult step. This is the reconquest of monumental expression.* (Giedion, 1944, p. 552)

Together with Josep Louis Sert and Fernard Leger (both CIAM members), Sigfried Giedion conceived the *Nine Points of New Monumentality,* a sort of manifesto advocating the need for architecture and urbanism to claim back their spiritual dimension. In fact, this document bears evidence to the shifting perception of

[1] First published in 1956 in Hamburg as vol.18 of the Rowohlts Deutsche Enzyklopaedie under the title Architektur und Gemeinschaft. Revision and translation into English has been curated by Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, CIAM member as well.

memory and to the need of bridging the divide between 'form' and 'content,' thus restoring figurativity to the realm of architecture.

Naturally, such positions among CIAM members challenged the orthodoxy of Modernism, leaving room for the fifth function[2] to surface. Spatially-wise, the modern monument found its ultimate expression in the civic centre (Giedion, 1944) '*a site for collective emotional events [...] where a unity of the architectural background, the people and the symbols conveyed by the spectacles will be achieved'* (Giedion, 1958, p. 39)

It comes as no surprise that such ideas resurfaced during the post-war period: European city-centres had been totally or partially erased, the social order undermined, shaking from the roots any blind faith in Functionalism.

Rather than simply rejecting Modernist urban models, *Nine Points of New Monumentality* sounded like a challenge to the new generation, in that architects were invited to consider monumentality when interpreting the 'heart of the city'[3] as the place for '*spiritual growth*' (Giedion, 1954, p. 12).

However, we cannot overlook the debated on the so-called *deliberate monument* (Riegl, 1982), concerning all those buildings meant to be monumental instead of functional, namely sculptures or three-dimension artefacts, erected in the historical urban fabric to commemorate an event or a personality. In such cases, monumentality meant mastering scale, a certain ornament, equating the relevance of a given event with the material durability of the artefact.

All these features characterised monuments produced upon great commissions, a set of established symbols that arouse the Modernists' disapproval and lost their evocative power in the wake of WWII destructions. At this crucial historical juncture, there seemed to be no future for the *classical monument* (Violi, 2012).

According to Giedion and his supporters, monumentality required a collaborative

[2] Besides the four elaborated in the Athens Charter, i.e. dwelling, work, circulation, recreation the fifth was civic representation.

[3] Title of the VIII CIAM in 1951 in Hoddesden, England.

work between architects, painters and sculptors.[4] Avoiding to erect monuments in the traditional manner, artefact and space had to be conceived as a whole, as an indivisible spatial entity.

In the changing political and ideological context of Socialist Yugoslavia, aesthetics, art and architecture aimed at a synthesis, somehow expanding the pre-war idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[5] After the war, Yugoslavian architects set synthesis as their programmatic objective. As stated in their manifesto, the Croatian group EXAT '51[6] (mainly including architects) epitomised the modernist idea of the 'total work' as a synthesis of pure and applied arts. EXAT '51 attempted to achieve a spatial synthesis that lead architect Vjenceslav Richter to design the Yugoslav Pavilion at the 1958 Expo in Brussels, contradicting the lingering stereotypes about socialist countries whose preferences lied in monumental and classical architecture (Kulić & Zarecor, 2014, p.228). The Yugoslav Pavilion received broad international consensus and ranked among the top four (Architectural Review, 124, August 1958). Even if it did not represent '*an architectural watershed*' in his home country, it certainly was an '*original achievements'* featuring *'new formulas for key dilemmas of modernity,'* such as synthesis of the arts. (Kulić 2014)

Despite architects' effort to present Yugoslavia abroad as a country that rejected monumentality, a process of 'memorialisation' did occur. During the so-called 'Enthusiastic decade' (Milasinović-Maric, 2017) more than 600 monuments, memorials or simple tombstone were unveiled, showing that monuments were back on the agenda of Yugoslav architects.

[4] t is a question Giedion rose during the VII CIAM. Articles presented during CIAM in a note called Architect's attitudes toward Aesthetics during CIAM VII in 1947; references can find in Architects and politics: an east-west during the CIAM VIII in Bergamo 1949.

[5] It is a word created by the German philosopher Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff in 1827 and refers to the fusion of music, dance and gesture. A possible translation is total work of art. Richard Wagner called upon this concept when referring to the creation of the drama but added architecture and sculpture

[6] Acronym for *Eksperimentalni atelje*, meaning Experimental Atelier. Founded in 1951 in Zagreb by architect and designer Bernardo Bernardi (1921-1985), architect Zdravko Bregovac (1924-1998), painter Ivan Picelj (1924-2011), architect Zvonimir Radić (1921-1985), architect and designer Bozidar Rašica (1912-1992), architect and sculptor Vjenceslav Richter (1917-2002), painter and sculptor Aleksandar Srnec (1924-2010), architect Vladimir Zarahović and painter Vladimir Kristl (1923-2004). In their manifesto, the members embraced Abstract Art advocating for the synthesis of all visual arts. The group was active until 1956.

The 'Enthusiastic' decade: monumentality in a Socialist country

The years from 1950 to 1960 marked a political and economic change for Yugoslavian architecture, a crucial shift from Social-realism towards a more '*locally adjusted*' modernism (Vodopivec, 2010, p. 31).

The architectural journal *Arhitektura* echoed the debate on Socialist-realism, whether or not to be understood as a style for representative buildings. This debate was developing at a time when cities were being rebuilt with many prefabricated residential quarters and very few monumental structures. This happened because the Soviet Grand-manner never took-off and monumental buildings often remained unfinished when not only ideal projects on paper.

In 1948, the rupture between the Yugoslav Communist Party and USSR Comintern paved the way for a major geo-political change, which sanctioned the end of Socialist Realism and fostered the connection between local and Western architects.

Economically wise, the decade from 1950 to 1960 marked the decline of state-run socialism and the five-year plans (which started to be adjusted) leading to a more flexible economical model. All this favoured massive housing and urban expansion, and a shift beyond aseptic functionalism towards a more humanistic architecture, which paralleled the CIAM trend towards a less dogmatic Modernism.

In November 1950, only two years after the rupture with USSR, architects and planners from all Yugoslavia met in Dubrovnik for the first time. The First Conference of Architects and Urban Planners of Yugoslavia provided an opportunity to find some common points for professionals from very different cultural and training backgrounds. In view of the adjusted five-year plan, they agreed upon the need of a new development model, equally distant from the Soviet and capitalistic influence.

For Yugoslav architects, this was a time of generational turnover: the pioneer modernists who had to cope with the Socialist political context and resulting economic and social change was giving space to the younger generation called upon to express a new architectural figuration.

The redefinition of the professional profile - from a collective design approach to a more personal and authorial engagement – was the major outcome of the Dubrovnik Conference, which also marked a revival of architectural design competitions. Seen as the best way for professionals to compete in creativity and originality, to provide investors (mainly public or state-run institutions) with high quality design proposal, competition announcements soon multiplied. Eventually, this situation fostered the formation of temporary design teams who competed with more institutionalised offices.

This trend favoured the exchange of ideas, opening to foreign influences thanks to Yugoslav architects who had travelled extensively abroad. As most announcements concerned architecture, urban and infrastructure projects,[7] competitions helped reshape the disciplinary boundaries of architecture (Stojanović, 1955). In 1947, Yugoslavia counted 889 architects and engineers, 60% employed by state-owned offices; the majority of them was from Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia, thus unevenly distributed among the Federal Republics. (Kulić, 2009)

In 1956, six years after the First Conference of Architects and Urban Planners of Yugoslavia, Dubrovnik hosted CIAM X, a by-product of Western friendly policies. The personal connection between Drago Ibler, a modernist architect from Zagreb who had moved to Switzerland in the Forties, and Alfred Roth, a Swiss member of CIAM, partly explains the choice of Dubrovnik as a venue (Bjazić-Klarin, 2016). Nevertheless, the perception of CIAM among Yugoslav architects was far from enthusiastic. Many Croatian architects labelled CIAM as '*international capitalist architectural organization*' (Bjazić-Klarin, 2016, p.44) or as '*an exclusive*' (Bjazić-Klarin: 44) and antidemocratic organization. Only a few Croatians took an active part in CIAM X and in the last CIAM held in 1959. For them, CIAM was certainly an opportunity to travel and work abroad in close relation to the leading international personalities. Significantly, those architects reflected the generational shift then occurring in Yugoslavia, and within CIAM. Croat architect

[7] Due to the lack of professionals in Yugoslavia in the first aftermath of WWII, engineers and technicians were allowed to make architecture and urban projects; they usually were appointed by administrative officials or due to political reasons.

Radovan Niksić, a former student of Ibler's, worked for six months in the firm run by J. Van den Broek and J. Bakema, also employing Milica Sterić, who was later to become the chief architect of Energoprojekt (a prominent state-run office).

The year 1956 was very significant because of the many architectural-related events.

The exhibition '*Apartment for our conditions'* (Milasinović-Marić, 2017) held in Ljubljana dealt with the same themes of CIAM X (*Chartre d'Habitat*). This event introduced the First Yugoslav Conference on dwelling and housing (26-28 May 1956). From 7 July to 6 August 1956, partially overlapping with CIAM X (3-13 July), Belgrade[8] hosted USA Contemporary Art from the MoMA, the last of a series of exhibitions promoting western art.

Yugoslavia political non-alignment left sufficient room for exploring monumentality as a quality to achieve without mimicking codified elements from the past. The effort consisted in pursuing a non-religious sacredness that could evoked people's struggle and sacrifice. Actually, sacredness became a recurrent theme among the architectural critics, marking the success of Yugoslavian memorials in Western journals.

L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui (108) in 1963, dedicated a monographic issue to sacred architecture[9] including Yugoslavia's memorials, with a special focus on Bogdan Bogdanović's work.

The personality of Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010) epitomised the urgency for a generation to emerge. Born into a bourgeois family from Belgrade, where he graduated in 1950, Bogdanović was one of the A50 generation, the core of the so-called Belgrade School of Architecture. In 1971, historian Zoran Manević described

[8] This exhibition was a travelling throughout Europe from 1955. Previously hosted in Paris, Zurich, Barcelona, Frankfurt, London, The Hague, Vienna and Belgrade. Yugoslavia was the one and only Socialist country that hosted the MOMA exhibition. The selection of artworks showcased mainly included abstract art. the artists who presented their work were Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Mark Tobey and Mark Rothko among others.

[9] The monographic issue is dedicated both to sacred architecture and structural experimentation. The main curator is Danielle Velaix.

Bogdanovic's work as 'Second Avant-garde',[10] equally distant from Socialist-Realism and the International Style. According to Manević, Bogdanović marked the revival of 'soil culture' and curved lines bringing back to focus both the ornament and landscape design.

Bogdanović managed to build up his entire career by designing monuments and memorials, establishing himself as an authority in the field. His 1952 competition entry for a monument dedicated to the Jews killed in Belgrade envisaged a cutting-edge solution. Adopting an asymmetrical footprint to encompass the nearby Jewish cemetery into the composition, Bogdanović's anti-monumental design envisaged the possibility to inhabit the monument. Rather than staging the new monument, Bogdanović used it to extend the perspective of a pre-existing central alley creating a space-time whirl while approaching to the monument.

Bogdanovic's work received broad international recognition before being fully appreciated in Yugoslavia.

Answering to O. Minić, in an interview published after the article in *L'architecture d'aujourd' hui,*[11] Bogdanović said:

> […] our sacred buildings are atheistic. But they find values in our architecture because we are stepping back to ancient, archaic and elementary human symbols.
>
> […] Even the man who has materialistic visions is facing the matter of death. In this case it's a violent death, a human suffering or a conscious victim, and these extraordinary ethical values of our time, our revolution seek for their spiritualized, artistic creation.

[10] Zoran Manević wrote that 1958 represented the peak of this movement, when the members (Aleksej Brkić and Mihajlo Mitrović) already had the chance to built. Manević traced a parallelism between the 1928, when the Belgrade Rationalists summoned into GAMP (Grupa Arhitekata Modernog Pokreta, i.e. Group of Modern Movement Architects). Manević is the first and only critic that applied this category for Bogdan Bogdanovic's work.

[11] The 1963 issue dedicated to sacred architecture and structural researches. It was curated by Danielle Valeix. The article included works by Bogdanović, Dzamonja and Vojin Bakić among others.

Also adding:

> […] The French didn't miss the fact that it is a new type of memorial entity with spatial features which integrate architecture and sculptures in a single whole, just like it happened in ancient architecture. (Minić, 1963)

In 1957, Partisan authorities launched the pan-Yugoslavian Competition for a memorial to be built at Jajincj[12], the site of two Nazi concentration camps close to Belgrade. The camps were set for political prisoners and 80.000 were killed from 1941 to 1943, deeply affecting Belgrade's collective memory.

The Jajincj Memorial was to be a park, an articulation of public spaces set in an evocative landscape. The Jajinci competition showed the importance of memorials and the need to emphasise the eminently memorial character of a given place. At Jajinci, memorial architecture was to evoke the landscape dimension of a trauma-site.

This competition ended by established the canons of a new monumentality that had to distance itself from the totalitarian regimes of the past and particularly from the Soviet social-realism.

The symbolical value of the great memorial transcended any utilitarian aspect, so much so that all efforts were concentrated on memorializing the site and overshadowing ancillary buildings.

Josip Seissel[13] (1958) wrote*: '[…] Modern monumentality! Two terms until recently mutually exclusive. Today we pronounce them together again.'*

An Avant-garde artist and architect during the Twenties, Seissel echoed the new perspective on monumentality:

[12] Jajinci is a municipality, 9 km southern from Belgrade.

[13] Josip Seissel (1904-1987), aslo known as Jo Klek. Prominent 20s Avangard artist. In 1929, he became an architect and after WWII professor at the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb. On the occasion of 1957 competition for Jajinci, Seissel served as a judging commission member. The commission numbered important architects (Ratomir Bogojević, Aca Djordjević, Smiljan Klajić, Edvard Ravnikar, Neven Segvić), visual artists (Marko Celebonović,Pedja Milosavljević, Rista Stijović) and writers (Dobrica Cosić, Jara Ribnikar).

> The development of modern architecture was bound to proceed in a direction opposite to the monumental. It was just in the name of monumentality that violence was committed in this area not long ago. (Seissel, 1958, p. 12)

The Jajinci competition marked a breaking point also because it gathered the prominent memorialist architects of Yugoslavia working in heterogeneous groups that included visual artists; the evaluating committee included politicians, architects, writers and sculptors.

The competition agenda emphasised the idea of the synthesis of the arts, steadily pursued for public and commemorative buildings but still with no precedents

The first prize was awarded to a team including the most prolific monument and memorial builders in Socialist Croatia.[14] Bogdanović's entry qualified for its originality, openly dismissing the functional requirement of the competition brief.

It is worth noticing that the Croatian architects who represented Yugoslavia at CIAM X in Dubrovnik also placed an entry for this competition. Aleksandar Dragomanović, Nino Kučan and Radovan Niksić[15] proposed a redesign of the landscape highlighting the highest quote of the hilly area with a monumental charnel house. The idea of re-dramatization was achieved by laying on the mass graves an enlarged detached ramp that enters the charnel house.

Remarkably, all the competition entries proposed movement as a key-figure of the composition. Rather than focusing on giant sculptural elements, all the participants acknowledge the importance of defining the approach to the site, '*the space emanating-power of contemporary sculpture*' in Giedion's words. (Giedion, 1958)

Bogdanović's proposal started from the poetic concept of the death – taking as

[14] The leading architect, Zdenko Kolacio (1912-1987) and the sculptor Kosta Andjeli-Radovani (1916-2002) were among the most prolific monument and memorial builders in Craotia during Socialist period.

[15] in collaboration with sculptors Dusan Dzamonja , architect Bernardo Bernardi, painter Olga Vujović all from Zagreb.

inspiration a verse from Garcia Lorca[16] - and its translation into spatial dramatization as a tool for visitors to *'re-experience'* (Violi, 2014) the drama through perception.

The modernity of such a proposal lies in the interplay between architectural composition and spatial narrative, aimed at informing / educating the visitor while also allowing for a memorable spatial experience.

Bogdanović and his group wrote in the submitted brief:

> A possible and frequent error in memorials of this type is that they may be approached from different quarters. We have an opposite attitude: we have closed the whole area and lead the visitor along a definite route, so that one may realize the essence and the entirely of the memorial in the shortest time. The principles of exposition are similar to the principles of museum display but, of course, on a large scale. […] our aim is to preserve with the aid of impressive strokes the character of this area which devoured a hundred thousand victims. The original topography is preserved and by being remodelled it is even accentuated. […] the configuration of the terrain is dramatized, given greater stress, and rendered more sensitized, than as it was found. (Bogdanović, 1958, p. 59)

In this unrealized project as in many others the positioning of a plastic object in the landscape works with the theme of the *'classical monument'* (P.Violi, 2014) but questioning its location within the landscape.

The architectural value of Bogdanović's memorials could be found in the mindful layout of artificial elements such as paths, viewpoints and sculptural elements leaning against landscape and wilderness of nature.

This idea of a spatial ensemble partly natural and partly artificial induce emotional effects in the visitor, and illustrates the attempt Yugoslav architects made to

[16] Garcia Lorca verse became also the motto for the project. the verse is: 'let them not cover his face with a handkerchief; let him inure himself to the death he bears'; it is taken from Lorca's 1935 poem *Cuerpo presente.*

materialise CIAM's 'fifth function'.

Concluding remarks

Yugoslav architects approached memorial buildings hovering between art and architecture and, more important, focusing on landscape. In so doing, they expanded the field of action to achieve the desired synthesis (Krauss, 1979). The design of memorials allowed architects to step out of strictly functionalist assignments and favoured collaboration and exchanges from different intellectual fields.

Paralleled by the liberalizing socio-political changes in Yugoslavia, the generation shift that occurred after 1950 eventually allowed for example authorship to prevail over collective projects originated from state-run ateliers.

While the synthesis of the arts was to broaden the scope of architecture, the quest for a new monumentality triggered a more complex thinking about the ultimate meaning of monuments and monumentality itself. Intentionally or not, CIAM discourses on monumentality never grasped the design of monuments as buildings meant to commemorate an event or a personality. The discussions rather stressed the social value of art and architecture meant to serve civic representational needs.

Assuming the plea for 'New Monumentality' launched by Giedion has been unconsciously interpreted, monument design in Yugoslavia sanctioned the creation of memorial as an original commemorative space typology.

Despite Yugoslavia was seeking international affirmation, local architects, except very few, never openly embraced post-WWII CIAM postulates.

The lack of clear evidence whether or not CIAM ideas circulated among the new generation of Yugoslav architects and how they were implemented is quite revealing. The impacts of CIAMs in non-Capitalist countries like Yugoslavia is a field worth to be further explored particularly taking into account dramatic political changes before and after WWII but also a very delayed modernisation and

urbanisation.

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